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5 Tips on How To Be a Prepared Health Advocate

Finding out about a newly diagnosed disease or condition can be overwhelming and scary. Whether you are acting as a self-advocate, or as an advocate for a loved one, it's best to be prepared for this new role. The spectrum of being an advocate depends on the seriousness of the diagnosis and treatment options. Thorough research, and the ability to be available and objective are some of the factors and skills needed to be an effective advocate.

Five different ways to prepare for the role as a health advocate include:

1. Identify the Health Advocate

Determine whether you will be able to self-advocate for yourself, or if it will be more beneficial to have a family member or friend serve in this role. Some hospitals can provide them, or you can hire one as well. To help make this decision, it's best to consider the following:

- Are you overwhelmed or scared by your diagnosis? Having someone with less bias, strong objective skills, and the ability to participate in appointments and treatments with you can provide comfort, and ensure clear and thorough communication with your health care provider.
- Will you need supervision and transportation to and from treatments?
- Do you know someone with specific medical knowledge or skill sets that could help you navigate your diagnosis and treatment?

2. Understand Your Health Insurance

Health insurance can be confusing and complicated. Take the time to find out what your coverage includes. Representatives at the hospital can often help, but it's best to also go over your benefits with your insurance directly. Keep copies of your insurance card with you, and keep your hospital bills and statements organized for reference purposes.

3. Be Prepared and Take Notes

Your time with health care providers can be limited. To maximize your time with them, prepare in advance. Research and write down your questions before going to your appointment. Be able share your relevant medical history and a list of medicines you are currently taking. Keep a notebook to take notes, citing the dates, future appointments, contact info, etc.... Use the same notebook regularly to keep your information in one place.

4. Do Not Be Afraid to Ask for a Second Opinion

Information and education are key to understanding all of your treatment options. Even if you are comfortable with the diagnosis and recommended treatment plan, you are entitled to get a second opinion to ensure you are considering all of your options. Do not be intimidated to ask, it is your health and your right to do so.

5. Get To Know Your Healthcare Providers

Developing a friendly and respectful rapport with those who will be regularly treating you is a great way to ensure better experiences during your appointments and treatments. By getting to know each other, it can help build communication, collaboration, and a shared sense of treatment goals.